

Remarks at a White House Event Celebrating Broadway
July 19, 2010

Well, welcome to the White House. I am just thrilled, and I know Michelle is thrilled, to host the sixth in a series of evenings celebrating the music that helped to shape America.

Now, so far we have heard from some of the biggest names in jazz, in country, in Latin, classical, and the music of the civil rights movement. And tonight we are honored to be joined by some of the biggest and brightest stars on Broadway.

And I notice—I should just point out that I see a lot of members of the New York delegation here. [*Laughter*] They take great pride in Broadway. I want to start by thanking George C. Wolfe and Margo Lion for making this event possible. So please give them a big round of applause. And I want to thank all of tonight's performers for sharing their gifts with us. They are just so generous with their time, and this will be a wonderful evening.

I also want to recognize my outstanding Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, who is in the house. Here she is right here. As well as the other members of the administration—thank you guys for the hard work you do each and every day. Thank you to the National Endowment for the Arts and the President's council on the arts and the humanities for their continued support. And I finally want to recognize Jerry Mitchell and everybody who participated in the dance workshop earlier this afternoon and helped inspire the next generation of performers—as well as my wife—to do a few dances. [*Laughter*] She was showing off backstage.

Now, as we're about to see this evening, there's nothing quite like the power and the passion of Broadway music. At its heart, it's the power of a story: of love and of heartbreak, of joy and sorrow, singing witches, dancing ogres. Musicals carry us to a different time and place, but in the end, they also teach us a little bit of something about ourselves. It's one of the few genres of music that can inspire the same passion in an 8-year-old that it can an 80-year-old, and make them both want to get up and dance. It transcends musical tastes, from opera and classical to rock and hip-hop. And whether we want to admit it or not, we all have the lyrics to a few Broadway songs stuck in our heads. [*Laughter*]

In many ways, the story of Broadway is also intertwined with the story of America. Some of the greatest singers and songwriters Broadway has ever known came to this country on a boat with nothing more than an idea in their head and a song in their heart. And they succeeded the same way that so many immigrants have succeeded, through talent and hard work and sheer determination.

Over the years, musicals have also been at the forefront of our social consciousness, challenging stereotypes, shaping our opinions about race and religion, death and disease, power and politics.

But perhaps the most American part of this truly American art form is its optimism. Broadway music calls us to see the best in ourselves and in the world around us, to believe that no matter how hopeless things may seem, the nice guy can still get the girl, the hero can still triumph over evil, and a brighter day can be waiting just around the bend.

As the great Mel Brooks once said, musicals "blow the dust off your soul." So to everyone watching, both here and at home, here's a taste of Broadway to help us do just that.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:15 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to George C. Wolfe, private member, and Margo Lion, cochair, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities; Broadway theater director and choreographer Jerry Mitchell; and entertainer Mel Brooks.

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